



World Christian Fellowship

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Apostles- Nathaniel

Luke 6:12-16

Luke 6:12-16, *Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.* ¹³And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: ¹⁴Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; ¹⁵Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; ¹⁶Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.

Group One:

1. Simon called Peter,
2. Andrew,
3. James,
4. John.

Peter, James, and John's names get mixed around in the list, Peter's is always first, but they are always in group one.

Group Two:

1. Philip,
2. Bartholomew — or Nathanael,
3. Matthew,
4. Thomas.

Always group two in every list.

The names of Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, and Thomas get mixed, but Philip is always the first name of group two.

Group Three:

1. James the son of Alphaeus,
2. Simon the Zealot,
3. Judas son of James,
4. Judas Iscariot.

Always the same in every list.

The names may be mixed a little bit, the two middle names, the names of Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James get mixed.

James the son of Alphaeus is always the first name in group four and Judas is always the last name of the twelve.

Nathaniel

Number six in the list of the twelve.

V 14 as Bartholomew.

He is better known as Nathanael.

Nathanael means "gift of God." El, is the name of God. It is Elohim, a portion of Elohim.

So, Nathan-el, Nathanael is a gift of God.

Bartholomew literally means "son of Tolmai."

"Bar" means "son of," bar mitzvah, son of the law.

He is Nathanael, son of Tolmai, Bar-Tolmai.

It may have been that his father's name was Tolmai.

There is a secondary possibility. There was among the Hebrews a sect. They were called ***Tolmaians*** because their leader was named ***Tolmai***. This sect was devoted to the study of Scripture. They gave much attention to the scriptures. It may be that Nathanael, Bar-Tolmai was the son of a man named Tolmai.

He was there for a son of Tolmai, in the sense that he was a follower of the man who started the group, whose devotion to Scripture marked him uniquely. He is Nathanael anyway, son of Tolmai.

He came from the town of Cana, Cana in Galilee.

John 21:2, Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together.

Cana short walking distance, from Nazareth.

There is only one passage where he is presented in the entire New Testament.

John chapter 1.

He was brought to Jesus by Philip, and every time you see the listing of the apostles, Philip and Nathanael or Philip and Bartholomew are always linked together.

So, they were friends through the years of their journey with Christ.

Peter and Andrew, James and John who were together as brothers.

We find these two, not brothers, but close companions in all the listings of the apostles they are identified alongside each other.

John the Baptist had pointed to Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The ministry of Jesus then officially began. Jesus called Simon and Andrew in the prior

passage to be His disciples. Later on they would become Apostles. At this point He just called them to be disciples.

On the very next day after He had done that, He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. He said to him, "Follow Me." Philip is identified as from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter, probably knew them well, attended the same synagogue with them, knew them to be seekers of the true God, lovers of the true God, with a messianic hope. They had very much in common. They were true believers of the true God and they were desirous of the coming of Messiah and they followed Jesus, hoping Him to be that Messiah for whom they had waited.

John 1:43-45, The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Now Philip found Nathanael. They were acquaintances. We do not know what that acquaintance was about. We do not know whether it was a professional one, or a family one, or social.

Philip found Nathanael.

Philip immediately went, pursued him and got him because he wanted to tell him what he himself had discovered concerning the Messiah.

Nathanael then was found by Philip where Philip was found by the Lord Himself.

Obviously, God was sovereignly overruling any circumstances that would cause any other finding to take place so that what happened was His perfect will. It was the will of God that Philip pursue Nathanael and bring him to Jesus, which is exactly what he did.

Now Philip's conversation with Nathanael gives us some introduction to what kind of a person he was.

The first introduction to Nathanael.

We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote.

What matters to Nathanael is Scripture!

Philip knows his friend Nathanael. He knows that Nathanael views things from the Scripture's standpoint. So, when he goes to him to introduce the Messiah that he has found from the standpoint of Old Testament prophecy.

This is to indicate to us that Nathanael and probably Philip together were students of the Old Testament.

He does not say to him, I found a man who has a wonderful plan for your life.

He does not say, I found a man who will fix your marriage.

He does not say any of those kinds of things that might appeal to some other element of the personality of Nathanael.

"We have found the one who is spoken of by Moses in the law and also the prophets." The law and the prophets were simply a term to refer to the Old Testament.

This indicates to us that he was a searcher of Scripture.

He is a seeker after divine truth.

Apart from Judas Iscariot, all the apostles were to some degree seekers after divine truth. That is, their hearts were right before God. They were sincere in their love for God and their desire to know the truth and to know the Messiah. They were very different than the religious establishment which was dominated by hypocrisy.

Philip finds his close friend, Nathanael/Bartholomew, and he tells him, "We have found the one about whom we have studied so long."

Very likely together they had poured long hours over the Scripture. Very likely they had searched the law and the prophets to discern the truth about the coming of Messiah.

Because Nathanael was so well trained in Scripture, perhaps better than Philip, but it was because he was so well versed in Scripture that he was so immediate in his response to Jesus.

He was able to recognize Jesus so clearly because he had such a clear understanding of what the Scripture said about Him. He knew what the promises said, so he knew what the fulfilment was. He knew Him of whom Moses and the prophets had written when He showed up. Not immediately upon the first introduction of Philip, but immediately upon the first introduction of Jesus he recognized Him.

"It is Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Son of Joseph was how you identified people.

Your second name is an identifying name with your family. It identifies you with your father.

Ancient times people have been identified by the father's name. So, this man named Jesus, which may have been a common name, **Yeshua, Joshua**, same name, is the Jesus who is the son of Joseph and from the town of Nazareth.

There had to be a certain amount of surprise even in the voice of Philip.

John 1:46, And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Insight into Nathanael; he as a student of Scripture, a searcher for the true knowledge of God. His spiritual side was strong and faithful and diligent, honest, but he was human.

This is just prejudice.

Nathaniel must have said in his heart, as I read the Old Testament, I read Micah the prophet, Micah says the prophet must come from Bethlehem, not Nazareth."

He could have said, "Philip, Messiah is to come from Bethlehem."

Or he could have said, "But, Philip, Messiah has to be identified in Jerusalem because He's going to reign in Jerusalem."

He could have said, "Philip, this is impossible, the Messiah can't come from Nazareth."

But he is flawed just like everybody else. He just flat says, "*Could anything good come out of Nazareth?*"

That is a general statement that manifests a prejudice.

That is not rational and emotional.

Nathaniel did not live in such a hot town himself, Cana. Cana was in walking distance from Nazareth, but it was off the beaten track and Nazareth was a crossroads. If you go north and south in the ancient world, you go through Nazareth.

If you are going up the coastland of Israel, you eventually get into the Galilee and you go through Nazareth as you head forward to eat, sleep, and get supplies.

If you are going east to west, you are going to go through Nazareth, very likely coming from the east headed toward the Mediterranean, or the opposite. It was a crossroads.

It was an unrefined town. It was an uneducated town. It is still the same, much the same way. It has a nice setting on the slopes of the hills up there in Galilee, but it is not a memorable town still and it was not in those days. There was an unrefined and uneducated lot that lived there. The Galileans even looked down on the Nazarenes and the Judeans looked down on the Galileans and really looked down on the Nazarenes.

God finds some pleasure by not only using the commonest of people but having them come from the most despised locations. Essentially, they have nothing going for them, except that they are used to transform the world and, in the end, the only explanation for that is God, so He gets all the glory.

It is inconceivable to Nathanael Bartholomew that the Messiah would come out of that cheap place called Nazareth, the rough place, an evil place, a sinful place, and corrupt place.

But to say, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" is just plain prejudice. A little bit of town jealousy maybe because Cana was certainly forgettable.

If Jesus had not turned water into wine there at a wedding, nobody would have ever given it a thought.

Prejudice is an ugly thing. It is uncalled for generalization based on feelings of superiority, not based on fact. But prejudice is very effective in cutting people off from the truth.

The whole nation of Israel rejected their Messiah because of prejudice. They did not believe their Messiah should come out of Nazareth either. They did not believe their Messiah and all His apostles could come out of Galilee. They mocked the apostles as uneducated Galileans. They did not like the fact that Jesus spoke against the religious establishment.

The religious leaders to ordinary people it was their prejudices that caused them to reject Him.

Even in His own town as we learn in the Luke 4th Chapter.

Jesus went into the synagogue, His own synagogue where He grew up in His own town of Nazareth, and He went in there and He preached, and they hated His message. They were so filled with prejudice against Him and against what He said that after He preached the sermon, they tried to take Him out to a cliff on the edge of town and throw Him off a cliff and kill Him.

It was really this prejudice that skewed their view of the Messiah. All the scribes and Pharisees, all the religious elite who were whitewashed tombs.

They were hypocrites, wretched on the inside and whitewashed on the outside. They were filled with prejudice against Jesus because He unmasked their wickedness, because He told them what the truth was about themselves.

It was their prejudice against Him as a Galilean, prejudice against Him as an uneducated person outside the religious establishment, prejudice against His message, prejudice against Him every way that literally shut them off from the gospel. They refused to hear Him because they were prejudiced against Him.

Moving from deafness you could borrow the vivid imagery of Paul, "The god of this world has blinded their eyes." Deaf and blind by their prejudice against the truth, against righteousness, they missed the message.

Was Nathanael influenced by that?

Sure.

He lived in a society that was prejudicial by temperament, nature, because all sinful people are tend toward being prejudiced. We all make prejudiced statements. We all draw prejudicial conclusions about certain people and certain classes, and certain societies.

He was like all the rest of us, but his prejudice had expanded a little bit and attached itself to a whole town. So, he was prejudiced, at least at that point.

Philip said to him "Come and see."

The way you deal with prejudice is not objective but subjective.
It is not based on fact.
It is based on feeling.
It is not based on reality.
It is based on sense of superiority.

Philip knew that the solution to his friend's prejudice was, "Come and see."

You do not need to have this prejudice, but you can have reality.

He went. A prejudiced mind, but a seeking heart and his seeking heart overpowered his prejudiced mind.

We learn about him the most important thing and we hear it from the lips of Jesus.

John 1:47, Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"

What a statement.

We hear this at a funeral!

Someone dies and the preacher says at the funeral "Well, they are going to heaven where they are going to hear, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'" That is a nice caption.

How would you like that at the beginning?

This man was pure from the outset.

He was human, sure he was flawed. We are all flawed and one of his flaws was he had prejudice. But it was also true of him that he was an Israelite indeed, for real, genuinely, truly an Israelite.

What is He talking about?

Jesus is talking about his descent from Abraham.

No, not in the physical sense.

He is not talking about his blood, his genetics.

What do you mean he is a true Israelite?

He is an Israelite who is true because in him there is no deceit. Deceit or deception.

What Jesus is saying is that for the most part the Israelites are not real.

Romans 9:6, *But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,*

Romans 2:28-29, *For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; ²⁹ but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.*

He was an inward Jew.

He was one who worshiped the true and living God.

This is the real thing.

John 8:31, *Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.*

Jesus used the same term. You are My true disciple. This was a true disciple from the start in whom there is no deception. There was no hypocrisy, and this is very unusual.

When Jesus indicted the religious establishment of Israel, He indicted them as hypocrites.

In Matthew 23 you have that amazing criticism against them in which He calls them hypocrites from every possible perception. Here was a non-hypocritical Jew. The synagogues were full of hypocrites. He found that out in His own synagogue when He preached, and they tried to kill Him because He had unmasked the true condition of their hypocritical hearts.

Here was a man who was a true Israelite, and a true Israelite is one who is an Israelite on the inside.

He has had his heart circumcised.

What does that mean?

His heart's been cleansed.

This was a justified man.

This was a righteous man.

This was a man who knew the true God and loved Him and served Him.

Flawed, of course, because everybody is, but he was the real thing.

He was not like the scribes.

He was not like the Pharisees and most of the rest of the people.

He was trustworthy, genuine.

The response of Nathanael.

John 1:48, Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”

He is questioning whether this man can be the Messiah that Philip says is the Messiah. He is questioning it.

He did not question Philip.

He did not that he questions the Scripture.

Nathaniel questions this man from Nazareth does not seem to fit the picture, son of a carpenter, a no-name, non-descript guy, who comes from a town that has no connection to prophecy, doesn't even exist in the Old Testament, so what is the point? He just cannot believe it.

How do You know me?

He sees it as just a little socializing of Him to bring him into the group.

Jesus answered and said to him,
"before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

He is talking about omniscience.

Jesus was not there, Nathanael knew that.
I saw you under the fig tree. This is omniscience.

A little more in this.

Poor people lived in a one-room house, for the most part, in Israel. They did everything in a house and the house could get full of smoke and it could get stuffy and was very hot. One of the ways they cooled off was to plant trees around a house, close to the house. One of the favourite trees to plant was a fig tree because it provided wonderful fruit, it grew to a height of about fifteen feet so you could get under it and it spread to a diameter of maybe thirty feet.

So, this would make a wonderful shade tree, a way to get out. They could leave the house, the closeness of the house, the heat of the house where they did all the cooking and everything. This would be a wonderful place to go. They also had a little patio on the roof but in the heat, they would not go up there. This was a typical place to go. It became kind of a private room for poor people. It became a kind of a place to go and sit and meditate.

Jesus is saying not just, I knew your geography, or I knew your physical location. But I saw you out there under the fig tree.

There is an old tradition according to **John Gill (Puritan writer)**. Jesus was referring the old Syriac tradition that Nathanael happened to be born at the time when Herod was massacring the babies. In order to save Nathanael from Herod's massacre, Herod's mother hid him under a fig tree.

Only problem with this that Herod was killing people in the south, and he was living in Galilee.

Also, since they had only one room, led to the people seeking quietness to pray and meditate outside the house beneath the shade of a fig tree.

If they wanted to escape the noise of the house, they would go out under the shade of the fig tree.

Jesus is saying that I know the state of your heart because I saw you under the fig tree and I knew what you were doing.

- That was your private room.
- That is where you would go and study.
- That is where you would go and pray.
- That is where you would go and meditate.

- ✓ I saw you in your secret place.
- ✓ I saw you in the private place.
- ✓ I saw you in the place of meditation.
- ✓ I knew what you were doing.

So, Jesus not only saw his location, but he saw his heart. I knew the sincerity of your heart because I saw right into you when you were under the fig tree.

John 1:49, *Nathanael answered and said to Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”*

John's whole gospel is written to prove that Jesus is the Son of God.

John 1:1-2, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God.*

John gives the testimony of Nathanael to add to the thesis of the whole gospel that this Jesus is the Son of God. The term "Son of God" always is used to refer to sharing the same nature. It is to say He is deity. He is of the same essence as God.

This man knew the Old Testament.

This man knew what the prophets had said.

This man knew who was coming.

Although He came from Nazareth, His omniscience, His spiritual insight, His ability to read the heart of Nathanael was enough.

John makes a point of this at the end of chapter 2. When Jesus was in Jerusalem after His first Passover there in His ministry time during the feast.

John 2:23-25, *Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. ²⁴ But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, ²⁵ and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.*

They believed superficially, they wanted to make a connection. He never allowed that to take place because He knew that they were not Nathanael in whom there was no deceit and no hypocrisy. He knew the real thing when He saw it and He saw it in this Israelite named Nathanael.

Nathanael knew He knew his heart. He not only knew his physical location, but He knew his spiritual condition.

John 1:49, *Nathanael answered and said to Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”*

You have the same nature as God.

You are one with God.

Numerous occasions in the Old Testament that the Messiah would be the Son of God.

Psalm 2:6-7,

You are the Son of God. That is the first thing, the deity of Christ. Second, You are the King of Israel, Messiah, the Anointed One who will fulfil all the promises made to Abraham and David.

He got the message, omniscience was enough. It convinced him. This man knew my physical location, and this man knows my heart.

He was like Simeon Luke chapter 2.

Luke 2:25, *And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.*

Nathanael was one of those deep students of Scripture, one of those true Jews who waited for the Messiah and knew when He

came, He would be Son of God and King. He was never one of the half-committed. He went all the way to total understanding and total commitment on day one.

John 1:50, *Jesus answered and said to him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.”*

Do you believe because of omniscience?

John 1:51, *And He said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”*

You have not seen anything yet.

All it took was omniscience, one incident of omniscience, seeing what no man could see physically, knowing a heart that no man could know spiritually, that was enough to convince Nathanael this was the Son of God and the King of Israel.

The other disciples they are going to struggle with. They are not going to understand. Even Philip, “Lord, show us the Father,” they are going to be struggling. Not you, everything you see is going to enrich what you already know to be true.

- ✓ They knew Moses, the writings of Moses, the Pentateuch.
- ✓ They knew the Law.

- ✓ They knew the writings of the Old Testament.
- ✓ They knew the Messianic prophecies.
- ✓ They now know Jesus fulfils all.
- ✓ They know He is the Son of God because He is evidenced His deity.
- ✓ They have got the full picture.

They would have a wonderful familiarity with Genesis chapter 28.

In Genesis 28 we read what is one of the most interesting of all the accounts in the lives of the patriarchs, and it had to do with Jacob.

Genesis 28:10-15, *Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. ¹² Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And behold, the Lord stood above it and said: "I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. ¹⁴ Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. ¹⁵ Behold, I am with you and will keep ^[c] you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this*

land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.”

God is saying,

- ✓ I am going to take you weary pilgrim,
- ✓ I am going to take care of you,
- ✓ I am going to fulfil My promises to you, and your people.
- ✓ I am going to fulfil the Abrahamic promise.
- ✓ I am going to develop your nation.
- ✓ I am going to bless your nation.
- ✓ I am going to bring salvation to your nation.
- ✓ I am going to open up heaven and make sure the angels go back and forth to protect you and care for you and your people until that covenant is fulfilled.

That is what Genesis 28 is talking about. Jesus borrows that here and says, “You are going to see heaven opened and the angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

You are going to see heaven’s power unleashed in My ministry!

Son of Man is a Messianic title from **Daniel 7:13-14**.

Jesus used it about eighty times to refer to Himself.

This is a graphic dream given to Jacob to assure him that heaven was paying attention to him. God was going to make sure the angels fulfilled their role in being how God keeps His protection on His people.

Jesus says to Nathanael, "You are going to see heaven open up and angels come and go in My ministry. I will do supernatural works, no doubt mediated in some ways by angels."

How did Jesus live His life?

According to the will of the Father by the Holy Spirit, mediated by angels.

- ✓ It was angels that announced to Zacharias that the forerunner would be born.
- ✓ It was angels that spoke to Mary.
- ✓ It was an angel that spoke to Joseph.
- ✓ It was a chorus of angels that announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds.
- ✓ It was angels who came in Matthew 4:11 and ministered to Jesus at the end of His temptation.
- ✓ It is angels who strengthened Him in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- ✓ It is angels that are at the tomb.
- ✓ It is angels that surround Him in His ascension.

Jesus does what He does by the will of the Father through the power of the Spirit by the means of the angels.

He was doing miracle after miracle, raising the dead, healing the sick, creating food, walking on water. Everything He did, everything He said, all the supernatural elements of His life, casting out demons, and you could just see Nathanael nodding it and the faith in his heart getting enlarged and enlarged by it

all. How wonderful to see someone so trustworthy and trusting from the very beginning so that the whole three years with Jesus was just this unfolding panorama of supernatural reality.

Of all the apostles, Nathanael seems to me to be the one who gained the most from his time with Jesus, because at the outset he knew exactly who He was.

Everything was an enrichment.

Nathanael enjoyed the fullest and richest and most complete blessing from his time with Jesus.

Nathanael who got the point of everything. He knew it was heaven coming down on the Son of God, the King of Israel.

Personal life:

To spread the word of God, the apostles were assigned to different countries. Nathaniel introduced Christianity to **Armenia (Turkey)** with **Saint Jude Thaddeus**, both are patron saints of Armenia Apostolic church. He also preached in Persia, Egypt and Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), which “cradled the most ancient civilization of human history.”

Nathaniel's duty was to look after the families of the twelve. He was often absent from the apostolic councils, for when he heard that sickness or anything out of the ordinary had happened to one of his charges, he lost no time in getting to that home. The

twelve rested securely in the knowledge that their families' welfare was safe in the hands of Nathaniel.

Nathaniel most revered Jesus for his tolerance. He never grew weary of contemplating the broadmindedness and generous sympathy of the Son of Man.

Nathaniel's father (Bartholomew) died shortly after Pentecost, after which this apostle went into Mesopotamia and India proclaiming the glad tidings of the kingdom and baptizing believers. His brethren never knew what became of their onetime philosopher, poet, and humourist.

But he also was a great man in the kingdom and did much to spread his Master's teachings.

He was flayed alive—the skin of his body cut into strips, then pulled off, leaving his body open and bleeding for a long time, then beheaded.

Why?

Because he was to die the Persian way in the “most barbarous country of the East” in the ancient times; because he converted **Polymius**, the king of Armenia, to Christianity. Because Astyages, the king’s brother, ordered his death.

A monastery named after the saint was built on the site of his martyrdom.